(b) whether the issue of granting MFN status to India has come up when the Pakistan Commerce Minister came to India recently; and

(c) if so, the details thereof and the reasons for not granting MFN status to India by Pakistan?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir. During the visit of President Musharraf to India (April, 2005), India and Pakistan agreed that the Joint Business Council should meet soon.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir. The issue of Most Favoured Nation Status to India was discussed during the meeting of Commerce Ministers of India and Pakistan with apex chambers, namely, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) and Punjab, Haryana, Delhi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), on the sidelines of the G-20 Meeting held in New Delhi in March, 2005.

Pakistan has so far not granted MFN status to India despite its obligations, including under the WTO, and has cited extraneous political, economic and other reasons for this.

Fall in coffee price

252. DR. M.A.M. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that coffee prices in the international market have fallen drastically thereby creating a lot of problems for coffee growers;

(b) if so, the special package announced by the Central Government for coffee growers;

(c) whether the coffee growers have alleged that correct information of the scheme has not been communicated to them by the concerned authorities;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the corrective measures taken to help the coffee growers in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Coffee prices were depressed during the last 3-4 years. However, prices have recovered in recent months.

(b) In order to provide relief to coffee growers, the Government of India has approved a package which is aimed at debt amelioration. The package envisages equal sharing of total interest burden of Rs. 287.10 crore on Special Coffee Term Loan (SCTL) during the three year moratorium period amongst the banks, the Government and the grower loanees to the extent of one-third each; requesting the banks to lower the interest rates charged on SCTL from existing 11% to 9% or rate applicable to agriculture sector whichever is lower, during the remaining repayment period of SCTL loans; writing off of coffee developmental loans along with interest amounting to around Rs. 24 crore, due from the Coffee Board to the Government of India (The Coffee Board will in turn waive the old developmental loans amounting to around Rs. 64.59 crore extended by the Board to the coffee growers having holdings below 10 hectares only) and also continuing the interest subsidy scheme on working capital loans for small growers (below 10ha) at the rate of 5% and large growers at rate of 3% for the remaining years of the Tenth Plan. The interest subsidy would be reduced by 1% for a period of 3 years in the case of those growers who receive the benefit of reduced interest burden on SCTL during the moratorium period.

(c) to (e) The Government has taken adequate steps to disseminate the information relating to Coffee Relief Package and the package has been generally welcomed by the coffee growers.

Backlog of vacancies of SCs, STs and OBCs

253. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of backlog of vacancies of SCs, STs and OBCs separately in his Ministry and its subordinate offices as on 30th June, 2005, category-wise; and

(b) the necessary steps being taken by Government to fill up these vacant posts of the above-mentioned categories?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the House.